

THE
LITTLE
GIRL
LOST

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RAPER

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The
Little Girl Lost

A Tale for Little Girls

BY
ELEANOR RAPER

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1902

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TO LITTLE PHYLLIS

E. R.

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The Little Girl Lost

CHAPTER I

NELLY AND HER FRIENDS

NELLY GREY was a little English girl who had never been in England. She was born in China, and went with her father and mother to live in the British Legation compound in Peking when she was only three years old. A compound is a kind of big courtyard, with other courts and houses inside. Nelly's was a large one, and very open. It had several houses in it: not like we

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have in England, but only one storey high, and with deep, shady verandahs round them. There were also a little church, some tennis-courts, and several small buildings for the Chinese servants at the back.

Nelly could speak both English and Chinese very well. She could play the piano a little, though not so well as most English children of nine years old. She could ride a donkey, skate, and play tennis, but she had never seen a bicycle or a real carriage, because there were no such things in Peking. But Nelly was quite lively although she was shut up in a compound all the time. She would have been ashamed to feel dull and cross, for she had once heard the Minister's wife say, 'Nelly Grey is an intelligent child and has sense enough to amuse herself.' Since then she had felt that

Nelly and Her Friends

she must not let the lady change her opinion. Besides, there were several other foreign¹ children in Peking whom Nelly saw from time to time. In her compound, living next door, was Baby Buckle. He had only been there six months, for that was his age, and Nelly loved him very much. He was such a jolly little fellow, always laughing and crowing, and almost jumping out of the arms of his Chinese nurse (who was called an amah) when he saw Nelly coming. And he used to open his mouth wide and try to bite this old yellow woman, and put his little fists into her eyes and kick her, until the poor old thing was almost worn out and could scarcely walk or even stand on her little misshapen feet. To be sure, he slept a great

¹ English, Americans, French, and all other white people are called foreigners in China.

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deal, or the amah would have been obliged to hand him over to a younger woman. There was another boy in the Legation, a little Scotchman, who was one year older than Nelly. They played together very often. But Nelly did not like boys—only baby boys, she said. Indeed, she often made Arthur Macdonald feel very lonely and unhappy because she preferred to leave him and go off to play with a Chinese girl of her own age, called Shiao Yi. Shiao in Chinese means ‘little,’ so we will call her Little Yi.

Little Yi’s feet had never been bound, because she was a Manchu child, and the Manchu women do not bind their feet ; so she could run and skip about the compound almost as freely as Nelly. Almost, I say, not quite, because Chinese children are not dressed for running

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about. Their shoes are hard and clumsy, and in winter their clothes are so thickly wadded that they look like little balls.

Then there were two little girls of eleven and twelve who lived at the German Legation, and were called Bertha and Liza Wolf. It was very strange for Nelly the first time these children came to see her. Mrs. Grey was calling upon their mother, who told her that they had just arrived from home with their governess. At once Mrs. Grey invited them to come to tea the next day, and she did not think of asking if they could speak English ; neither did their mother, who spoke English beautifully, remember that her children could not do so. When they arrived, Nelly was alone with Chu Ma, her amah, and they all laughed a great deal when they found that

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they could not understand one another. Bertha Wolf had picked up the Chinese word 'pu,' which means 'not,' and she kept repeating that and mixing it up with German. It sounded very funny. Nelly showed them her dolls' house, and Liza made the dolls sit down and stand up in a marvellous way by bending their legs and sticking pins into them. When tea-time came the children had become fast friends by means of nods, shakes of the head, and the Chinese word 'pu'; which shows that little girls can get on very well together even when they don't chatter all the time. Since then Nelly had been taken to the German Legation twice a week to have German lessons from Fraulein, Liza's and Bertha's governess, and they, besides quickly picking up Chinese, came and took English lessons from Mrs. Grey very often.

Nelly and Her Friends

At the American Legation Nelly had a friend, Bessie Bates, who had a brother named Bob, a regular tease. Bessie was only eight, but Bob was eleven, and every one said that he ought to be at school in America. Then there were several children living in the mission compounds, but none of them were near Nelly. At one of the missions there were fifteen children among the four families stationed there. Nelly told her mother that it made her hoarse to go to that mission, because there were so many people to talk to.

Even if there had been no other companions, Nelly would have been content to be with her father and mother. She used to love the time just before she went to bed, when Mrs. Grey nearly always read to her and told her stories about England. They often talked of Nelly's brother

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Tom, who had gone to school at Brighton when the Greys came to Peking.

With seven o'clock came Nelly's amah to put her to bed. The amah would have willingly done everything for Nelly, but Mrs. Grey insisted that she must undress herself and not become helpless, as children brought up in the East often do, because there are so many servants to wait on them. At first she used to feel a little afraid when the amah blew out the candle and left her alone in her little bed in the middle of a great big dark room'; but her mother had taught her that God takes care of us in the dark just the same as at any other time, and she soon learnt to curl herself up and go quietly to sleep.

CHAPTER II

LOST

ONE Monday, when Nelly had had her tea, she went out of doors to watch for her father coming home. He had been out on his pony, and Nelly wanted him to take her up and give her a ride round the compound. The large gates were open, because the gatekeeper had just been out and seen Mr. Grey coming, so Nelly ran out into the road without thinking what she was doing. If she had stopped to think, most likely she would not have passed the gate, as she knew that she never

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went outside the Legation compound alone. However, she soon saw her father, who was very much surprised and rather alarmed to see his little girl there. But Mr. Grey, who spoilt Nelly, did not scold her, but stopped, took her up, and gave her the ride she wanted. He meant to reprove Chu Ma for not looking better after her charge, but he did not see her again that evening, and in the morning he forgot it.

The next evening, after tea, when Chu Ma was chattering to Mrs. Buckle's amah, Nelly thought it would be nice to have another ride with her father. The gate was again open, and Little Yi was standing near it. When Nelly said that she was going to meet her father, Little Yi offered to go with her. The two children went out, but saw nothing of Mr. Grey. 'We'll

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walk to the end of the road and look up Legation Street,' said Nelly.

Little Yi was quite willing, and they trotted along, all the Chinese staring very hard to see a little foreign girl in the streets without even an amah to look after her. They had not far to go before they came to the corner, but when they looked up the street they could see no one but Chinese.

'We might walk on a little,' Nelly said. 'He is sure to come this way, and it will be such a nice long ride back. You, Little Yi, can ride with the ma-fu (groom). It will be fun.'

But Mr. Grey had not gone in that direction at all, and the little girls were not likely to see him.

Of course the Chinese went on staring at the children, and a crowd soon gathered round them.

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Presently some rude boys began to ask them all sorts of questions and to laugh at them. Nelly did not like it at all. She thought she would not wait for her father any longer, but go home. They tried to turn back, but found Chinese all round them, and felt quite frightened. Then a nice, clean-looking woman came up to them and said :

‘Don’t mind all those people. Come through my house and return home round the other way ; I’ll show you.’

Nelly and Little Yi thought the woman very kind. They went with her through a door into her compound, and, after crossing two or three court-yards, they came to a small set of rooms which the woman said were hers. She asked the children to sit down, gave them

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some sugared walnuts, and said she would go and ask her son to take them home.

Chinese sugared walnuts are very good, although they don't look tempting, being of a purplish whity-brown colour. Nelly liked them better than the chocolate creams which auntie always sent for her in the big box of groceries Mrs. Grey had from England twice a year. When all the walnuts were eaten, the children amused themselves by wandering round the room and examining everything in it. It was not at all like any room in an English house. The floor was stone, and part of it, called a kang, was raised like a platform. Every house in North China has one of these kangs, with a little fireplace underneath. In winter the Chinese burn charcoal in this fireplace, and at night they

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spread wadded quilts on the warm brick platform and sleep there. In the daytime the quilts are rolled up and the kang is used as a seat. The windows were small, with tiny squares filled in with paper instead of panes of glass. There were two large square arm-chairs and a square table with a tray and some tea-cups upon it. On the walls were scrolls with funny pictures of men running all over each other, like flies on a cake, Nelly thought.

When they had waited a very long time and it was getting dark, the children began to be afraid. The door was locked and they could not get out. Nelly was a brave little girl, but she could not help crying when she thought of the anxiety her parents would be in about her.

‘Oh dear,’ she sobbed, ‘why

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don't they let 'us out? Let us scream, Little Yi.'

And both the children shrieked their hardest, until they heard footsteps hurrying across the court.

The door was unlocked, and the woman who had brought the children there came in with a very old woman, a girl of sixteen, and a boy of ten.

'What is the matter?' they asked.

'Oh, take us home,' cried Nelly.
'It is quite dark.'

The boy having brought a lamp, the room was no longer in darkness, but Nelly meant that as it was dark it must be late.

'We can't take you home,' said the woman. 'None of us know the way to the British Legation except my son, who is not here. He will not be home now until to-morrow. He went outside the city into the

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country, and must have arrived at the gate after it was closed.'

'Then please take us to the door you brought us through and lend us a lantern, and we can find our way quite well,' said Nelly.

'No, no, you can't. You would get lost,' replied the woman. 'You must wait here until my son comes home.'

'We won't,' said Little Yi, and made a rush for the door. But the boy caught her and forced her back on the kang.

'Why do you want to keep us?' asked Nelly.

'It is our custom in China, when we find children, to keep them until we can hand them over to their parents,' said the woman whom they had thought so nice, but whom they now considered very cruel.

She was a tidy-looking woman,

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wearing black trousers bound tight round the ankles, and the usual blue cotton smock. Her feet were not very small, and she could walk about fairly quickly. The old woman was very ugly and untidy, but the girl evidently gave a good deal of attention to her toilet. She had silk trousers and a handsomely embroidered smock over them. Her feet were very small, and just like a claw. Her hair, which was a beautiful jet black, was dressed most elaborately with a sort of comb behind, and flowers stuck in. Her lips were stained red and her face was powdered. She wore long silver nail-protectors on the third and fourth fingers of each hand, and had very large round jewelled earrings. The boy had a greasy black cotton coat and a thick long tail of hair.

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Nelly tried her best to persuade the family to allow Little Yi and her to go, but they would not listen to her. Then Little Yi began.

‘You don’t know what bad luck you will have if you keep a foreign child all night,’ she said. ‘The foreigners are wonderful people. They can do all sorts of things—take out their teeth and put them back again, their eyes too, some of them.’

There was once at Peking a gentleman with a glass eye, and Little Yi had heard that he was able to remove it. As for teeth, she knew quite well that the British Minister slept with his on his wash-stand every night.

When Little Yi found that the women were not at all afraid, she said :

‘If you keep us here, she (point-

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ing to Nelly) will die, and then she will always haunt you. Everything you eat will taste bitter and make you ill.'

But Nelly never would allow Little Yi to romance and tell untruths. She was crying bitterly now, but she stopped and told the woman that she was a Christian, and that Christians do not die on purpose to haunt people out of spite, as heathen do.

But the children found that it was useless to try to persuade or frighten the Chinese. Nelly gave it up and asked for something to eat.

'To be sure,' said their first acquaintance ; 'I have told the coolie (a Chinese servant who does only the rough work) to bring you something.'

She had hardly finished speaking

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when the man arrived with two bowls, in which was a sort of soup containing little pieces of meat and vegetables. The children were given chop-sticks with which to fish out the meat, and were expected to take the soup from the bowl. Then they had a piece of Chinese bread, which is like steamed dumpling, and half an apple each. Nelly might have enjoyed the meal if there had not been eight eyes watching her all the time, and the old woman constantly peering at her clothes and feeling them.

When all was eaten they were told that they were to sleep on the kang with the girl, who would look after them until morning. The other three then left them, shutting and locking the door.

As soon as they were gone, the girl began to talk freely. She said

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her name was An Ching, and that she was the daughter-in-law of the woman Ku Nai-nai who had brought them there. Her husband was the son who, Ku Nai-nai said, was to take them home. The boy was his brother and the old woman their grandmother. Lowering her voice, she told them that her husband was not away from home at all, and that he intended to keep Nelly and Little Yi until he heard that a reward had been offered for finding them, and for her part she was very glad that they were there. It was very dull for An Ching. Her mother-in-law would not let her stand at the door and look up and down the street as some young wives were allowed to do. She also told them that Hung Li, her husband, lived at a city called Yung Ching, and he, she, and Ku Nai-nai

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were to go back there next day.

An Ching was very anxious to see Nelly undress, and got quite excited over her clothes. She had never seen foreign clothes before. Little Yi became quite lively in showing off Nelly and talking about all the wonderful things foreigners had, but Nelly felt very unhappy. She longed for her dear father and mother and her own little bed, and she wanted to kneel down and say her prayers, but felt afraid to do it before An Ching. At last she found courage to say that she was going to pray, and Little Yi at once began to explain the whole of the Christian religion to An Ching. Meanwhile Nelly quietly knelt down upon the kang and said her prayers, taking care to ask God to comfort her parents and send her

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back to them soon. The poor child felt much happier when she had done this. She crept into her quilt, and was soon asleep. Little Yi and An Ching presently came and curled themselves up on the kang, and all was silence until next morning.

CHAPTER III

A JOURNEY IN A CART

WHEN Nelly woke next morning she felt rather stiff, for she had never slept on a stone kang before. Little Yi and An Ching being still asleep, Nelly got up very gently and said her prayers. Then she thought she would get dressed before An Ching was able to annoy her by fingering all her clothes. How thankful Nelly felt that she could dress herself! Bessie Bates, she thought, would not have known what to do; for Bessie never even put on her own shoes and stockings.

A Journey in a Cart

Nellie would have liked her bath to-day, although she often felt that she could do very well without it. But she knew that it was impossible to have one, and made up her mind to dress without washing. Imagine her surprise when she found that her clothes had been taken away from the corner of the kang where she had left them, and a little suit of Chinese girl's things put in their place! They were not new clothes either, although they certainly did look fairly clean. Just then An Ching woke, and laughed when she saw Nelly standing without anything on but the little white petticoat she had slept in, and looking for her clothes.

‘Where are they?’ asked Nelly.

‘Ku Nai-nai came in early this morning and took them away,’ replied An Ching. ‘She wants

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you to put on our kind of clothes. Make haste and we will go across the courtyard to Ku Nai-nai's room for breakfast.'

Then An Ching awoke Little Yi, who was very much amused to see Nelly putting on her Chinese dress.

'But her hair won't do,' said Yi.

'No,' replied An Ching, 'we must see to that.'

Poor Nelly ! She had to swallow very hard to keep back the tears. What did they mean to do with her ?

She soon found out, however, when they had all taken some Chinese porridge in Ku Nai-nai's room, and wiped their faces and hands with wet towels. Ku Nai-nai told her that she was to have her head shaved in front and the back dressed in a tail like Little Yi's.

A Journey in a Cart

Nelly begged and protested and cried in vain. An Ching told her that it was of no use to cry, and that if she made any trouble or noise she would be whipped, but if she were good and quiet no one would be unkind to her.

A Chinese barber arrived, and poor Nelly was obliged to submit to having her front hair cut away and a small portion of her head shaved. Nelly's hair was dark, though not black, like a Chinese child's. They all said she looked very nice, and the boy grinned from ear to ear. Nelly would have liked to slap him. The barber seemed very well satisfied with his work and the pay he received. Ku Nai-nai threatened him with all sorts of revenge if he breathed a word of what he had done, and told him that if he kept

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quiet they would perhaps employ him to take Nelly back to her parents.

When the barber had gone, two carts appeared in the small compound, and out of one stepped a young, surly-looking man, who, An Ching said, was her husband. His name was Hung Li, as Nelly soon found out by his mother screaming all sorts of directions at him, when he began to pack the carts. Boxes and bundles and food for the journey were put in, and the children began to understand that they were to be taken to Yung Ching with Hung Li, his wife and mother. However, they had been so much comforted by learning, through the talk with the barber, that they really were to be given back to their parents, that going to Yung Ching at first did

A Journey in a Cart

not seem to matter much, especially as they had no idea where Yung Ching was. There was no putting on of cloaks and hats, the Chinese not using these articles.

An Ching and the children were in one cart, which was driven by a carter, while Ku Nai-nai occupied the other with her son as driver. The cart was most uncomfortable ; it looked like a large arched travelling-trunk, covered with dark blue cotton. Open at one end, it was placed between two heavy wooden wheels, and had a square board in front, from which the shafts stuck out. It was on the side of this board that the driver sat, and the others were inside under the covering, sitting flat on the bottom of the cart, for there was no seat.

It was a fine, bright, breezy April day. As the cart jumped and jolted

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over the lumpy, unpaved road, Nelly could not see outside at all, for the carter had pulled down the curtain, with its square piece of gauze for a window, and besides, there were such clouds of dust that when she tried to look through the gauze she could not tell where they were. Little Yi fixed her eye to a tiny hole she had found in the blue cotton. She noticed that they passed the American Legation, but after that the road was quite strange to her, as she had never been far from home.

The carters were yelling to their mules and the street hawkers were crying their wares, but above their noise the children could hear the humming of birds' whistles overhead. The Chinese tie whistles under pigeons' wings, and when the birds fly they make a strange kind

A Journey in a Cart

of humming or whistling noise. Nelly thought they must be the pigeons that often flew over the Legation compound, and belonged to a mandarin who lived not far away. The birds seemed to Nelly to hover about the carts for some time ; but at last they evidently remembered that it was the hour for them to feed, and they turned round and flew home.

About noon the travellers reached the great, high wall that stands all round the city, and passed through the gate. When they were well on the road outside Peking, Hung Li stopped the carts and said every one was to get out for a time. But Nelly and Little Yi were only allowed to stretch their limbs for about five minutes, after which they were made to get into the cart again, and the curtain was pulled down as

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before. They were given a little food, and were quite glad to be alone, as they had not been able to speak to each other, without being overheard, since the day before.

‘Do you think your father will give money to have you back?’ asked Little Yi.

‘Yes, of course. Won’t yours? They won’t ask him so much as mine,’ answered Nelly.

‘Well, you see, I am only a girl,’ said Little Yi. ‘I know my father likes me as much as my brothers, but he would be ashamed to make a fuss over a girl.’

‘Oh, what will my mother do?’ cried Nelly. ‘I am afraid she will think I am dead. I would not mind so much if only I could write to her. Won’t your mother be miserable too?’

‘No,’ replied Little Yi. ‘She has

A Journey in a Cart

her sons, and she will know that I am with you, but I am afraid she will scold me for going outside the gate.'

'I should not like to have a Chinese mother,' said Nelly. 'They don't love their little girls as English ladies do.'

Just then An Ching threw back the curtain and got in. There was really not enough room for three in the cart, and they were soon dreadfully cramped. An Ching told the children they had better try to sleep, and she let them put their heads on her lap. They were glad to do it, for they were very tired. Nelly dreamed about her father and mother and Baby Buckle. She thought she heard the baby calling her name. Indeed, she was sure she heard him crying, even after she was sitting up awake. She was about to rush out

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of the cart, which had stopped, when An Ching held her back and told her that what she had heard was a Chinese baby in the inn at which they had just arrived, and where they were to pass the night.

CHAPTER IV

ALONE AMONG THE CHINESE

THE children were glad to climb down from the cart and breathe the pure, fresh, country air. No house was to be seen except the inn. All around were stubbly fields, with trees in the distance. The road along which they had come ran in front of the inn, and was almost hidden by grass. The inn itself was surrounded by a low wall. There were several buildings, a large one in the centre for the inn-keeper and his family, some sleeping-rooms, and sheds for the carts and mules. Ku Nai-nai,

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An Ching, and the children were shown into one of the sleeping-rooms. Then the girls were allowed to stroll about the yard. No one took any notice of Nelly. Ku Nai-nai explained that she was a southern child whom they had adopted. She forbade Nelly to speak any English, and would not allow either of the children to talk to the people of the inn. Little Yi, she said, was her grandchild.

After supper (bowls of rice only) the women went out and sat down on the side of the road and chattered. The children came too, and Nelly watched the sun set. It was the first time in her life that she had ever seen it go right down behind the earth and leave nothing but the fields in front of them, all quite flat. She asked Ku Nai-nai if they would be up in time to see it rise again

Alone among the Chinese

in the morning. Ku Nai-nai told her that they intended to start very early, and she could come out and look if An Ching would come with her. An Ching said she would if she were not too sleepy. An Ching had never thought of wanting to see the sun rise. 'Foreigners had such funny ideas,' she said.

When the sun had quite set they went in to bed, all four on one kang, and slept well in spite of the fleas.

Next morning, before daybreak, Hung Li knocked at their door and asked for their bedding, so that he could put it in the carts. Nelly remembered the sun first thing, and as soon as she and Little Yi had put on some of their clothes, they made An Ching come out with her hair unbrushed. The children ran in front to the spot where they were

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the night before, but saw only a grey mist.

‘Why, there is no sun!’ said Little Yi. ‘We are too early.’

‘I quite forgot that the sun never rises in the same place as it sets. We must go round to the other side of the inn,’ said Nelly.

An Ching was quite puzzled, and thought it wonderful for Nelly to know where to look for the sun when she had never been there before.

They went round the inn and found the sun just appearing like a golden ball. It seemed to come up very quickly, and then all around was quite light and bright. When they went back to the inn An Ching was very anxious for Nelly to explain all about the sun’s movements, but Ku Nai-nai said it was time to go, at which Nelly was not sorry,

Alone among the Chinese

because she was not sure that she remembered all there was in her geography book about the sun.

Ku Nai-nai said that the sun did the same thing where she lived in the country when she was a girl, and it used to set behind different trees at different times of the year.

‘When you are as old as I am, An Ching, you will know more about things,’ said she. ‘You would know more now if you spent less time in looking into the glass.’

And then they certainly would have quarrelled, if Hung Li had not appeared and scolded them for not being ready ; at which Ku Nai-nai turned upon him and asked in a loud voice what he meant by being rude to his parent in a public inn. As no Chinaman likes to appear disrespectful to his mother, Hung Li said no more.

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At last they were ready to start again. Nelly could scarcely climb into the cart, so stiff and sore was she with her long cart ride of yesterday and two nights on a stone kang with only a wadded quilt to lie upon. But she did manage to get in, though not without shedding some tears at the thought that she was going farther away from her parents. And somehow the cart did not seem to bump so badly to-day, and the stiffness wore off instead of growing worse as she had expected. She was getting used to it.

They went along very slowly all day, and put up again that night at another inn. This time it was a small village, and there was no open space in front. The children were too tired even to talk. They both went to sleep almost as soon as they arrived, and slept until rather late

Alone among the Chinese

the next morning, for Hung Li did not now seem to be in such great haste to reach Yung Ching. When they woke they were quite fresh, and Little Yi was anxious to be off once more ; for An Ching said that there was a river to cross, which she seemed to think rather exciting.

In about two hours' time they came to this river, which was after all only a muddy stream with steep banks. There was a flat ferry-boat with two men to manage it. These men, the carter, and Hung Li took the mules out of the carts and made the women and children sit well back in them. Then they slid the carts slowly down the incline and on to the boat, and took them over, after which they fetched the mules and harnessed them again. Then came the difficult part, to get the

The Little Girl Lost

mules to pull the carts up the incline at the other side, with the men pushing behind and shouting and screaming at each other and the poor mules, enough to deafen you. The children's cart was tilted so high that they were looking up at their toes all the time : at least Nelly and Little Yi were, for An Ching's toes had become claws some years ago. At last, with a mighty pull from the sturdy mules, they got up the bank, and the other cart was not long in following.

Two hours more and they were at Yung Ching. As they entered the town Hung Li came and pulled down the curtain, but not before Nelly had peeped round the opening and noticed that the roads were not black, like those of Peking, but proper dust colour. Everything had a brownish look, she thought, and

Alone among the Chinese

it certainly was not a large city such as Peking.

‘Here we are at last,’ said An Ching, and the carts turned under an arch and Hung Li knocked at a large door, which was opened by a middle-aged woman, who was the only servant of the Ku family, Nelly learnt afterwards. This woman stared very hard upon seeing the children, but Ku Nai-nai told her in a low voice not to ask any questions while the carter was there, and said she would tell her all about them when he was gone, which she did, promising a portion (very small) of the reward they were to get for the children when they were taken home.

The compound seemed clean and well kept, and Nelly thought that the Kus ought to be far too respectable and well-off people to steal

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children for money. 'But they are only heathen,' she said to herself.

Nelly and Little Yi were given a small room adjoining Ku Nai-nai's in the centre or chief building of the compound. An Ching and her husband had their quarters at the right, across the court. The children were sorry that they were no longer to be with An Ching, but, as she said, it was only at nights that they need be separated.

Nelly was the only European in Yung Ching among thousands of Chinese. She never thought of that. Had she done so she must have felt glad that she was shut up in a compound, away from curious eyes and fingers.

CHAPTER V

THE SEARCH

CHU MA was the first to miss Nelly in the Legation. She rushed about as fast as her little feet would allow, calling, 'Ni-li! Ni-li! Ni-li! Ku-niang!' (Ku-niang means 'Miss' or 'girl'). She overturned Arthur Macdonald's top in her flurry, just when he had lashed it up into a beautiful spin. Arthur was cross about the top, but he could not help laughing to see solid Chu Ma in such a fuss. 'She is hopping about like a hen on a rail,' he thought. 'What is the matter?' he asked.

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‘I can’t find Nelly anywhere,’ replied Chu Ma. ‘Do you know where she is?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Arthur, ‘but I should think that she is playing some girl’s game with Little Yi and her dolls.’

Chu Ma had not thought of Little Yi. She at once tottered off to the girl’s house, only to find that Lin Nai-nai, Little Yi’s mother, was wondering what had become of her.

Lin Nai-nai, seeing that Chu Ma was scarcely able to hobble any farther, offered to go and look for both the children. She, being a Manchu, had unbound feet, and soon inquired about the children at every house in the compound, but she was obliged to return to Chu Ma without them. The two women then went back to Mrs. Grey’s

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house, and there made further search and inquiries. Mrs. Grey was dressing to go to dine at the American Legation with Mr. and Mrs. Bates. Chu Ma knocked at her room door to see if Nelly were there. Of course she was not. Then Chu Ma told Mrs. Grey that Little Yi could not be found either. Just then Mr. Grey arrived and was told too. Remembering that Nelly had come out to meet him the day before, he at once went to question the gatekeeper as to whether the gate had been left open again. The man declared that it had not, that he had never left it a moment, and that only Little Yi had been near it that afternoon. She, he said, he had seen walking towards her own home. This was not true, as we know, for the gatekeeper had left the gate open while he went to buy

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some rice, and it was then that the children had slipped out.

Mr. and Mrs. Grey became quite uneasy, for they knew that the children could not be hiding such a long time, as Arthur Macdonald suggested. Mrs. Grey declared that she could not think of going out to dine until they were found, and Mr. Grey then went himself to each house in the compound. After another hour's fruitless search, Mrs. Grey wrote a note to Mrs. Bates, explaining why she could not come, and asking if by any chance Bob and Bessie knew anything about Nelly. Bob persuaded his mother to allow him to go back with the coolie who had brought the note and help to look for Nelly. When he arrived at the British Legation, he and Arthur Macdonald set to work to look in

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all the places that they had ever hidden in when playing hide-and-seek together. They insisted also upon going into all the Chinese and students' quarters, and looking into places where it would have been impossible to hide.

'You forget, Arthur, that we are looking for girls, not a thimble,' said Bob, when he saw Arthur rummaging in a small pigskin trunk of Chu Ma's.

And now it was quite dark, and still there was no news of the girls. Mr. Grey went to all the Legation and Customs' people, but no one knew anything about the missing ones. The search had to be given up for that day, and Bob went back to Bessie, who was sitting up, anxious to hear the news.

After a sleepless night Mr. and Mrs. Grey rose early and began the search again. Mrs. Grey wrote

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notes to all the missionaries, and Mr. Grey went out to inquire among the Chinese. Perhaps if he had turned to the right up Legation Street, as Nelly and Little Yi had done, he might have heard something about the foreign child who had gone with a woman into a Chinese house near. But he went over the bridge in the other direction.

That afternoon, when Bob Bates set out for his usual ride with his ma-fu, he decided to make inquiries among the Chinese. The ma-fu suggested that they should ask at some of the shops in Legation Street near them, and sure enough they soon heard that a crowd had been seen following a European and a Chinese child in the streets the evening before. Bob was very persistent, and gave cash (small coins) for everything which appeared to

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be reliable information. At length, by means of questions and cash, he found some one who had seen Nelly and Little Yi follow Ku Nai-nai into the native house. He at once left his pony with the ma-fu, found the house, and knocked hard without any result. He could get no answer at all. Then Bob went breathlessly to the British Legation with the news that he believed that Nelly was shut up in a house close by ; but Nelly, as we know, was asleep in the cart on her way to Yung Ching. Mr. Grey was still out, and Bob had to wait until he returned. They went together to the house and knocked again. This time the old woman of whom we have heard admitted them, and when questioned, said :

‘ Yes, the children did step in here with a woman who comes

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to see me sometimes, but they only stayed until the crowd had gone. Then they set off home.'

This was all that old Ku Tai-tai would say. She declared she knew no more, and did not know where the woman lived. Her name was Wang, she said.

Mr. Grey was obliged to return to his wife with no news but this. He went to the Chinese magistrate, who thought the children were being kept in hiding until a sufficient reward was offered for their release, and advised him to have bills printed and stuck up, announcing how much he would pay to any one who brought back the little girls.

When this was done, Nelly's and Little Yi's parents could only wait, which is often the hardest thing we have to do.

CHAPTER VI

IN CAPTIVITY

By the time that Nelly and Little Yi had been at Yung Ching a month, Nelly and An Ching had become great friends. Poor Nelly would have been very miserable but for An Ching, who used to cheer her by constantly talking about Mr. and Mrs. Grey and when Nelly would be back in Peking. And An Ching used to tell Nelly about her own childhood, which must have been very dull, Nelly thought ; her marriage to Hung Li when she had seen him only twice,

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and how she was carried in a red chair from her parents' house to Ku Nai-nai's. She told Nelly that Hung Li was very greedy, and would do anything for money. It was he who prevented his mother from taking the children home the evening they left the Legation, as she at first fully intended to do ; but Ku Nai-nai was herself rather fond of money, and did not require much persuasion.

An Ching taught Nelly to sew backwards in Chinese fashion, using a thimble without an end, like a thick ring, on her finger ; and she cut out and helped her to make a little blue cotton coat which they thought would fit Baby Buckle. Nelly used to kiss and pat that little coat, and loved it quite as much as any doll she had ever had. In return Nelly taught An Ching

In Captivity

to knit, with some chopsticks, which they pointed at the ends, for needles.

The children were rarely allowed to go outside the Kus' compound, and never alone, but they could play out of doors as much as they wished. The larger court had the houses or set of rooms in it, and there was a smaller court which was entered through a queer gateway just like a large round hole in the wall. This court was at the side of Ku Nai-nai's rooms, and had no windows looking into it. An Ching, Nelly, and Little Yi used often to go and sit there with their work, and the children sometimes played at jumping through the hole. They saw no one but the Kus and their servant. Even when the barber came to shave Hung Li's head they were shut out of

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sight, and their hair was kept short with Ku Nai-nai's scissors.

Little Yi was becoming almost reconciled to life in Yung Ching, for although she was fond of her parents, she did not love them as Nelly did hers. She missed the large compound of the British Legation, and would have been very pleased to know at any moment that she was to be sent home. But she ate, slept, and was just as contented all day long as she had always been.

But Nelly, poor child, was no longer the merry little hopping and skipping creature she had been in Peking. She never had a fit of the giggles now, and she was thin and pale ; still, she was not absolutely miserable, for she felt sure she was going to leave Yung Ching soon, especially after she overheard a conversation which took place in

In Captivity

Ku Nai-nai's room one night after she and Little Yi were in bed.

Hung Li began by telling Ku Nai-nai he had been cheated out of some money by a man with whom he had done business that day ; and he added :

‘It is time these children went home now. I must have more money. I shall go and see the barber when next I go to Peking, and arrange with him to give them up to their parents.’

‘How do you mean to do it?’ asked Ku Nai-nai. ‘If the barber goes to the Ying-Kua-Fu (British Legation) he will certainly be arrested, and then he is sure to tell about us.’

‘Do you think I shall let him go to the Legation?’ replied Hung Li, scornfully. ‘No,’ he went on ; ‘I shall write a letter to the foreign

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girl's father, asking him to send some one alone with the money to the Chien Mên (centre gate). I will be there to meet the messenger, and the barber will be outside with the children in some retired place. I shall take the messenger to see the children, and then he will hand over the money. The barber can slip away afterwards.'

'Yes,' grunted Ku Nai-nai, 'and what's to prevent the child telling her father where to find us in Yung Ching?'

'And what if she does?' replied Hung Li. 'No one has seen the children. The mandarin of this district is my friend, and I can make it all right. You don't suppose I want to adopt the children? You (turning to An Ching) would like to keep that pale-faced little foreign imp, I suppose, but you shan't do it.'

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An Ching did not reply, but next day, when Nelly told her that she had been awake and heard the talking in the next room, she said :

‘No one cares for me here, and I am of no use in the world. If I can get away I shall try to come to you in Peking.’

‘Oh, do,’ said Nelly, delighted. ‘How can it be managed?’

‘I don’t know. We must think it all out. I am not as stupid as Hung Li thinks,’ replied An Ching. ‘If I were sure that your father and mother would take me as a servant, I’d manage it.’

‘I am certain they will when they hear how kind you have been to me,’ said Nelly. ‘You shall come as my maid to England ; but you can’t do much, can you ? You don’t know about our ways ; but never mind, I’ll teach you. Wouldn’t you like

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to learn some English to begin with ?’

And Nelly at once began to give English lessons to An Ching, and Little Yi sometimes condescended to listen. They had no books, and it was only by repeating words and short sentences over and over again that anything could be done. Nelly was much bothered when she was asked the names of things that do not exist in English, such as the hair ornaments worn by the Chinese women. She was obliged to invent names for them. For instance, the embroidered band a Chinese girl wears as soon as she is old enough not to have her hair shaved in front Nelly called a ‘hair-belt,’ and the curved, flat ornament sticking out behind An Ching’s head she christened ‘head-protector.’ Nelly was not quite sure that it was good

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English to invent names, but she said to herself, 'The Chinese call a tea-cosy "a tea-pot's hat" and a sewing machine "an iron tailor."' Greatly to Nelly's surprise and sorrow, there were times when she could not remember the names of things in English. She was, in fact, beginning to forget her own language. One day, when it had taken her a very long time to remember that 'wa-tzu' meant stockings, she was in great trouble, until Little Yi reminded her that she had always called them 'wa-tzu' in Peking. 'I've often heard you say that and lots of other things in Chinese when you were speaking English,' added Little Yi, decidedly.

Nelly next set to work to teach An Ching to sing hymns, and succeeded pretty well, as far as the tune was concerned, with the help of

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Little Yi, who, having often listened with all her ears to the singing in the Legation chapel on Sunday mornings, knew some of the airs quite well. An Ching and the two children used to go through the round gateway into the inner court, and while Nelly sang the words very distinctly, An Ching and Little Yi hummed the tune. 'Art thou weary' was their favourite hymn.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHESHIRE CAT

It began to be very hot about the middle of May. The Ku family had put their wadded clothes away and taken to cottons and thin silks. Nelly and Little Yi were also supplied with some very plain unwadded cotton coats and trousers at the same time. But in spite of this the little foreigner, as the Chinese called her, began to feel the heat and confinement of the small compound. She thought of her friends, who would all be preparing to go to the hills with their

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parents, and the days seemed very long. It was hard just to wait, with nothing at all happening. One day was just like another. There were no Sundays, no letters, no books, no lessons. The time was not even divided into weeks. Nelly quite lost count of the date. She only knew it Chinese fashion, by the number of new moons there had been since the Chinese New Year.

It appeared as though Hung Li never would go to Peking as he had said, but he did start one day at the end of May, and An Ching told the children that he intended to see the barber and arrange for them to be handed over to their parents. He had business to do on the way to Peking as well as in that city, so that he would be away some time, An Ching said.

Nelly was very glad to see Hung

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Li start, and she leaped through the round hole in the wall again and again, really and truly jumping for joy. She made An Ching and Little Yi sing their very best and loudest, until the small court resounded with the strains of 'Art thou weary,' and Ku Nai-nai, who was rather deaf, and shouted a good deal when she talked, heard the singing in her room, where she was sitting smoking on the kang. Little Yi and An Ching soon tired of singing so hard this hot day, but Nelly was too full of delight at the thought that Hung Li was actually off to feel any fatigue. She was more like little Nelly Grey of the British Legation than she had been since that unlucky day on which she wandered from home. She kept up her spirits and energy for two or three days, and then something happened.

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One morning the two children and An Ching had been singing and Nelly giving her English lessons as usual, when Ku Nai-nai came out, and in her usual rough, loud, screaming voice when angry, demanded why they were wasting time there instead of helping to get the mid-day meal ready. An Ching had quite forgotten that the old woman-servant was not well, and was shut up in her room out of the way. The children began to follow An Ching; but Ku Nai-nai, who certainly appeared to have got out of bed the wrong side that morning (only you can't get off a kang except at one side), would not allow Nelly in the cook-house. 'No foreigners shall meddle with *my* food,' she said; whereat Nelly was very glad, for she had only offered to go and help on An Ching's account.

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So Ku Nai-nai hustled off An Ching and Little Yi, at the same time telling Nelly to stay where she was. Nelly, left to herself, drew the bench upon which she had been sitting quite near the wall, so as to be in the shade. Presently she heard something scraping against the wall on the other side, and it seemed as though there were voices quite close.

The Chinese being very fond of privacy, all the compound walls are built very high and solid, and as the houses are only one storey high, no one can see into his neighbour's premises. Nelly did not remember to have heard any sounds coming from the next compound before ; but noises there were, sure enough, and the talking became more and more distinct. Nelly got up from her seat to look at the wall.

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As she did so, she saw what was evidently a Chinaman's head just above the top, and she heard him quite distinctly tell some one below 'to hold the ladder tight.' Nelly was just wondering what she should do, and was half inclined to run through the hole into the next court, when the rest of the head came into view, and she saw that it belonged to a plump, pleasant looking Chinaman. It was very round, and Nelly was at once reminded of the Cheshire cat in *Alice in Wonderland*. It and she looked at each other for some seconds. Nelly was the first to speak.

'Oh !' she said.

'A fine day,' said the head.

'Rather hot,' replied Nelly.

'Was that you singing?' asked the head.

'Yes,' answered Nelly.

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‘I can sing that too,’ said the head. Nelly was too much astonished to reply.

Then the head rose a little higher, and showed a pair of shoulders and arms. ‘He does not look like the Cheshire cat now,’ thought Nelly, ‘but a rather nice Chinaman.’ He continued :

‘How is it that you have large feet? You look like a foreigner. Don’t be afraid of me.’

Thus encouraged, Nelly replied : ‘I am a foreigner, and of course I have large feet.’

‘What are you doing here?’ asked the man.

‘I have been brought here,’ replied Nelly vaguely, ‘and I want to get away, but Ku Nai-nai will be very angry if she knows I am talking to you.’

‘Then don’t tell her,’ said the

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man. 'I shan't. She is the woman who speaks so loudly, I suppose. I'll bob down if she comes. Where do you live?'

'Peking, the British Legation.'

And then Nelly told the man all about Little Yi and herself being brought to Yung Ching by Hung Li and Ku Nai-nai. When she had finished the man seemed to be considering for some time. At length he said :

'Perhaps I can help you to escape. You had better not say a word to any one. Would you come with me and leave the Chinese girl?'

'Oh no,' replied Nelly. 'Little Yi does not mind being here nearly so much as I do, but she does not want to stay, and I am afraid they would never take her home without me. I wish An Ching could come with us.'

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‘Who is An Ching?’

‘She is Hung Li’s wife,’ Nelly replied, ‘and is very kind to me. Hung Li and Ku Nai-nai don’t care for her. They make fun of her and call her stupid, but she isn’t, although Little Yi can cook and help with the work better than she can. Her feet are very small, so of course she can’t run about much. She is pretty, too. Her skin is almost white, and she can embroider beautifully, and I want her to come and be my maid and learn English. Mayn’t I tell her about you? Little Yi might let it out, but I don’t think An Ching would.’

‘No,’ said the man. ‘Tell no one yet. I will talk to my family about it, but I don’t think we can take An Ching. She belongs to Hung Li, but you don’t. I will come again to-morrow or the next

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day when you are alone. Look here,' he continued, thrusting his right hand up his left sleeve and producing some red paper, which he threw down ; 'pick this up quickly and hide it.'

Nelly did so at once, thrusting the precious paper into her sleeve.

'When you are alone,' he continued, 'tear off a bit of paper and throw it over the wall. If any one comes, and you hear me on the ladder, begin to talk loudly, and I shall keep away. Could you be here to-morrow morning while the women are brushing their hair?'

'Oh yes,' replied Nelly, delighted. 'I could easily come. Little Yi likes to watch the hair-dressing, and I don't. I am often here alone then.'

'Very well, expect me to-morrow morning. I will go now.'

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‘Stop,’ said Nelly. ‘How is it that you can sing that hymn? Are you sure you can?’

The man smiled, and in a low voice began :

Lao-lu kun-fa fu chung tan ti
Hsin li chiao ku-nan
Yu i wei k'ai en-tien ch'ing ni
Te p'ing-an.

As he went on Nellie opened her eyes and mouth wider and wider, so surprised was she.

‘Why,’ she exclaimed, when he stopped, ‘I don’t know it in Chinese,’ and she was too puzzled to say more.

‘The hymn has been translated by a missionary,’ the man said. ‘I am a Christian. See you again.’

And he bowed and bobbed down out of sight, leaving Nelly in the middle of the court, too astonished to move.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHANG FAMILY

NELLY stood perfectly still for some seconds, gazing at the empty space on the top of the wall. Then she pinched herself to make sure that she was not dreaming, and said, 'Well, I never! A Christian! That is why he looks so nice.'

Then she went back to her bench and began to think hard, keeping up a small flow of conversation to herself all the time, somewhat after this fashion: 'Now let me see. He is a Christian, and this is Yung Ching. Have I ever heard

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of any missionaries who live at Yung Ching? No, I haven't. If there are other Christians here, there must be a missionary who comes sometimes. Should I ask Ku Nai-nai if there are any Christians in Yung Ching? I'd better not. I wish it was to-morrow morning. It may rain, and then what shall I do? Oh dear, some of that red paper is sticking out of my sleeve. I must tuck it in,' which she did, and continued: 'Perhaps after all he is only a Roman Catholic Christian. Well, that is a great deal better than being a heathen, although some missionaries' children don't seem to think so. Do Catholics sing "Art thou weary," I wonder? There is that red paper again. Where can I hide it? Behind this little heap of stones in the corner; and then I'll

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go and see what the others are doing.'

Nelly made a hole in the heap of stones and carefully hid the red paper. She had barely finished when Little Yi came running to call her.

'Come and see what I have made to eat,' she panted. 'I really am a good cook. I don't know how my mother can get along without me. I know so much about foreigners, too,' said Little Yi, who was certainly becoming more conceited than ever. She was a smart child, and more energetic than most Chinese. Ku Nai-nai was becoming quite fond of her in a selfish fashion, because Little Yi could fill her pipe, arrange the rooms, and run to fetch things much better than any child of her age whom she had ever known, although she did not

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always remember that none of her family and friends were Manchus, and that the poor little Chinese girls of Yi's age were all suffering from foot-binding. Luckily for Nelly, Little Yi's concoction of meat, flour, and sauce quite took up the attention of the household ; otherwise, they might have noticed how thoughtful she was. Indeed, Little Yi did remark that Nelly did not appear to think much of her dish.

There was plenty of time for reflection all the afternoon and evening, for Ku Nai-nai seemed determined to have a regular turn-out while the old woman was out of the way, and kept An Ching and Little Yi quite busy. Nelly decided that if the Christian—for that was how she thought of the Chinaman—could help Little Yi

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and herself to get away before Hung Li returned, they had better go with him. But would Little Yi consent? When the children were together in Peking, Little Yi gave way to Nelly in everything, but now Nelly did not feel so sure of her. She went to bed early, and never ceased to wonder what was going on in the next compound until she fell asleep.

Now the next compound was built on nearly the same plan as the Kus'. The dwelling-places were all in the centre court, and there was the same large round entrance left in the wall, through which you could pass into a small court at the side. This was next to the Kus' small court, and it was there that Nelly's Christian, whose surname was Chang, had appeared over the wall. Hung Li and Ku

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Nai-nai did not know that there were any native Christians in Yung Ching, but there were, and they even had a small room set aside for preaching and Christian worship, where an English clergyman from Peking sometimes held services. The room was in the compound of the native lay reader's house, quite at the other side of the town, and Chang and his family were the only converts who did not live close to this little meeting-house.

When Chang, chuckling to himself at the astonishment he had caused, descended the ladder, he found his wife waiting for him at the bottom. They both went through the round hole in the centre court and then indoors. Chang Nai-nai was most eager to learn all that Nelly had said, for she had only heard one-half of the

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talk from her post at the foot of the ladder, and as it was she who had first heard the sound of hymn-singing coming from their neighbours', she considered herself entitled to know everything. When her husband had satisfied her on this point, she demanded of him what he was going to do. Her little eyes twinkled as she suggested that they might just as well have a reward on the children's account as Hung Li. 'And,' she added, 'we have to live, even if we are Christians.'

'To be sure,' said Chang, 'and are we not living pretty comfortably on the type-cutting I get from the missionaries in Peking? I shall do my best to help the children to get home, even if I gain nothing by it, but if the foreign child's father offers me something afterwards I shall not

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refuse it. Suppose our son had been stolen, what should we have done? There he is.'

A tall, pale boy of fourteen appeared in the doorway.

'Listen, Chi Fu,' he continued; 'I have seen one of the hymn-singers,' and he repeated his account of his adventure of the morning, and told his son how he and Chang Nai-nai had gone into the small court and heard Ku Nai-nai call away her daughter-in-law and Little Yi, and tell Nelly to stay where she was. When they found that only one person was there, Chang had ventured to fetch a ladder and look over.

'Now, Chi Fu, my clever son, you must tell us how we are to get hold of these children, and then I can easily take them to Peking.'

'You'll be only too glad of an excuse to get to Peking,' struck in

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Chang Nai-nai, 'and I shall be left here to look after all those young fowls. It is not easy this hot weather, and Chi Fu there has his head too full of books and learning to be of any use.'

'Now don't scold, old woman,' replied Chang. 'I can take some of your chickens to sell in Peking at the same time. Fatten them up well, and the foreigners will give me good prices.'

Chang Nai-nai only grunted. She was not really mean and greedy, but she loved to make a fuss.

Meanwhile Chi Fu had been reflecting, his knees crossed one over the other and his head resting, in what he thought was a graceful attitude, on the palm of his left hand, supported by his elbow on the table.

'Respected father,' he said, when

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he could get a word in, 'it seems to me that the first thing to be done is to write to the young lady's parents. All we need do is to inform the honourable gentleman where his daughter is to be found.'

'That is so, my son, and you can write the letter.'

'I will write to-morrow, after you have inquired the correct name and address of the young lady's father. To avoid risks, in case the letter should be opened on the way, instead of writing in the usual characters of our language I'll use the Romanised, which I learnt in the mission school in Peking.'

'You'll write your letter and send it, and before any one can come the children will be off with that man Ku Hung Li. We must get them here before he returns,' said Chang Nai-nai.

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‘You are right too, my mother. The letter shall be written, and we will also try to think of some other plan to benefit the foreign and native young ladies.’

With which Chi Fu rose slowly and majestically, and glided into the next room.

CHAPTER IX

CHI FU'S SCHEME

CHANG and his wife saw no more of their son that day until it was time to eat rice in the evening. Chi Fu had been at the mission compound. Naturally the Changs were both full of excitement over the morning's adventure ; so little happens to disturb the tranquillity of home life in China. They had talked of nothing else, and were quite ready to begin again when Chi Fu arrived.

‘ Well, have you thought of a plan to get hold of those children ? ’ his

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mother asked, as soon as he had swallowed one bowl of rice.

The family oracle replied slowly that he had thought a good deal about it, and that he had inquired at the mission when the courier was going to Peking.

‘You surely did not tell about those children?’ screamed Chang Nai-nai.

‘No, I only asked about the courier,’ quietly replied Chi Fu, ‘and as he has only just left, my letter could not go until next month. It would not be prudent to send a letter written in foreign characters otherwise than by the mission courier, and were I to use Chinese writing it might be read on the way.’

Chi Fu partook of another half bowl of rice, and then continued :

‘Therefore it would be advisable

Chi Fu's Scheme

to make some plan for the escape of the two young ladies, and receive them here.'

'But what plan?' cried his mother. 'Your father and I have been thinking it over all the afternoon, and there seems no way.'

'No, there is no way unless we get the help of some one in the compound,' replied Chi Fu. Then he dropped a little of his dignity, and warming to the subject, unfolded his plan, which was that his father should question Nelly next day about An Ching, and that if she seemed reliable Nelly should tell her everything, and they would arrange a meeting between her and Chang. If An Ching were willing to help, it would be quite possible to get the children over the wall by means of ropes. Chi Fu, who certainly had a good head on his

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shoulders and could use it to some purpose when he forgot his affectation, suggested also that in case of an extra courier being sent from the mission, or the arrival of a missionary, Nelly had better write a letter to her parents, which he could enclose.

‘But,’ said Chang, ‘if we get the children, are we to keep them here until they are taken back to Peking?’

Chi Fu replied that he was afraid his father would be obliged to make the journey to Peking, and told his mother to fatten her fowls in readiness. There would be plenty of time, as Ku Hung Li was not likely to be back yet, and they could not attempt to get the children away except by night, in which case they must wait for the moonlight.

Chang and his wife thought that their clever son had planned every-

Chi Fu's Scheme

thing marvellously, and next morning Chang went into the small court and waited to see what would happen. He had not been there long when he saw a little red ball on the other side of the wall rise up in the air several times. Nelly was trying to throw a pebble wrapped in a piece of red paper over the wall, but as Bob Bates had often told her, she threw just like a girl, and it was only after several attempts that her little red messenger landed on Chang's side.

Very soon after her successful throw Nelly saw Chang's pleasant, round, smiling face appearing cautiously over the wall. When he was satisfied that no one else was looking, he came a step higher.

‘Good-morning, Ku-niang (young lady),’ he said. ‘What are the others doing, and where are they?’

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‘They are all busy doing their hair,’ Nelly replied ; ‘at least An Ching and Ku Nai-nai are. Little Yi is washing some rice at the well, and the old servant is still ill. I’ll begin to sing at once if I see any one coming. I can see quite well through the hole when I stand here in the middle of the court. Please will you tell me your name ?’

Chang did so, and said : ‘My son thinks that we ought to let An Ching know of the plan to get you away. Are you sure she is to be trusted ?’

‘Oh yes, quite,’ replied Nelly.

‘You are sure she won’t tell her mother-in-law or any female friends who come to the house ?’

‘I am certain she won’t say anything about it to Ku Nai-nai, and I don’t believe she has any friends. She wants to get away from here and come to me in Peking. But there’s

Chi Fu's Scheme

Little Yi,' Nelly went on. 'She'll be cross if I tell An Ching and not her.'

'Well, well,' said Chang, 'of course she will have to know, and it may as well be now.'

And then he told Nelly about his son's idea that she should write to her father.

Nelly was delighted, until she suddenly remembered that she had nothing to write with.

Chang at first said that she must do her best with Chinese paper and the brush that the Chinese use for a pen, but then he recollected that Chi Fu had a lead pencil and some foreign paper, of which he was very proud. He promised to throw them over the wall, and went on to talk about his clever son. He had by no means finished when Nelly, who spied An Ching coming, suddenly

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began to sing most vigorously. Chang broke off and vanished, leaving Nelly standing in the middle of the court foolishly looking at the wall.

‘Whatever is the matter?’ An Ching asked when she had hobbled into the court. ‘What are you looking at?’

‘Nothing,’ said Nelly; ‘at least he’s gone now.’

‘Who? What do you mean?’ exclaimed An Ching.

‘The Christian—I mean Chang.’

An Ching was more and more puzzled, and looked at Nelly in wonder.

At length Nelly said, ‘Come and sit down and I’ll tell you all about it.’

They both sat down on the bench near the wall, and Nelly told her tale to the astonished An Ching, or rather

Chi Fu's Scheme

she half told it, for just as she was in the middle of it Ku Nai-nai came shouting for that lazy An Ching to come indoors.

You may be sure that An Ching made haste to finish up her work after they had all eaten their mid-day meal. She and Nelly got out to the court alone, and Nelly was able to finish the exciting story. An Ching was too surprised to offer any advice. She agreed, however, that Little Yi must know at once, and when that young lady joined them she was told the wonderful news of the man in the next compound who was willing to help them to get away.

Little Yi was quite as enthusiastic about it as was possible to a Chinese girl. She wanted Nelly to throw over some red paper at once to call Chang, but An Ching said that as

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Ku Nai-nai had already been smoking and dozing some time, she might call them at any moment, so it was decided that they should wait until next day, and throw over the paper as soon as ever Ku Nai-nai was comfortably settled on the kang with her pipe.

Poor An Ching! she hated the thought of being left behind, and was dreadfully disappointed when she heard that Chang had said he could not take her; but she promised to do nothing to hinder their flight in any case. There was one thing she did not want to do, though, and that was to talk to Chang over the wall unless his wife were there. 'You must see him first, Nelly,' she said, 'and tell him to send up his wife to talk to me, or else get two ladders. It would not be at all proper for me to speak to a strange man alone.'

Chi Fu's Scheme

Respectable Chinese young women never do that.' Nelly saw no objection, though she thought An Ching was foolish, and it was decided that she and Little Yi should receive Chang next day.

CHAPTER X

PREPARATIONS FOR FLIGHT

IF Ku Nai-nai had been more wide-awake, she could hardly have failed to notice how quickly the housework and cooking were done next day ; but as she was not given to interesting herself in other people's motives (although she was very suspicious when there was the slightest cause for it, and sometimes when there was none at all), she did not observe that Little Yi was eager to prepare her pipe and pot of tea, while An Ching and Nelly wiped out the bowls and put them in the

Preparations for Flight

cook-house. There is not much to do in a Chinese family—no scrubbing or polishing ; the cooking, too, is quite simple in the ordinary home. The stone floors are swept and the furniture wiped over. The Chinese don't mind dust, but they like to have things in their places and the rooms orderly. Chinese girls never come in from a walk and throw their hats and gloves on a chair, because, to begin with, they don't wear hats and gloves, and they very seldom go for walks.

An Ching pretended to be cross because Nelly had spilled some rice, and told the children to go off and leave her to finish alone. They went directly to their favourite side court, and at once got the red paper out of the heap of stones and threw a piece with a pebble inside over the wall. Nelly finding that she

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could not throw any better than before, Little Yi tried, and succeeded very well—so well, indeed, that Chang was there with his ladder in almost no time after they had left the house. He gave the children the usual Chinese greeting of, ‘Fine day. Are you well?’

Nelly replied: ‘Quite well. It is rather hot. This is Little Yi.’

Chang hoped Little Yi was well, and when she had replied that she was, and hoped he was too, he asked for ‘the young Ku Nai-nai,’ meaning An Ching.

Nelly explained (not without the assistance of Little Yi, who liked to put in her word) that An Ching did not consider it proper to talk to Chang without his wife.

Chang repeated this to his wife, who was at the foot of the ladder.

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‘She is quite right,’ said Chang Nai-nai.

‘Then,’ said Chang, ‘you must come up and talk to her.’

Now Chang Nai-nai had never mounted a ladder, and she was rather afraid to do it, but she thought she would like to see into the next compound, and resolved to try.

Chang came down, and she cautiously went up a few rungs, but stopped and asked Chang to follow her, as she felt rather nervous. When Chang had reassured her, she ventured to go two rungs higher, gave a great sigh, and exclaimed, ‘You are not following me!’

Chang told that he could not very well do so until she was higher still.

Chang Nai-nai, who was very determined and not lacking in courage, resolutely went up a little

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higher. She was now more than half way to the top, and there she stuck, seized by a sudden terror. She looked very funny, clinging with both hands to the ladder, and her little claw-like feet close together on one of the rungs. Chang could not help smiling, which greatly annoyed the poor woman, and she at once began a tirade against the foolishness of An Ching. Why could she not talk with a grey-headed old man (Chang had about six grey hairs) who might have been a grandfather had their little baby girl lived and been married at sixteen, as she herself was? 'I won't have anything to do with helping the children to get home to their parents, no matter what the reward may be, if I am obliged to climb ladders and talk with ridiculous young women,' she went on.

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‘Come down, then,’ said Chang.

But this was more than could be expected of her. As we all know from experience, especially girls who have got so far as climbing into a hay-loft, it is very much easier to go up a ladder than to come down. Chang Nai-nai might have remained where she was until she dropped off, had not Chang mounted after her and almost carried her down.

When the little woman was safely deposited on the ground, she became less irate against An Ching.

‘What can be done?’ she said. ‘The young woman is in the right, but mount that ladder again I will not. If she can find a ladder and climb up on her side, let her do so. If she can’t, as she is trying to help a foreigner, she might adopt the foreign custom of talking to any one.

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You can go up again and tell the children what I say. When she knows what I've suffered on that ladder she will give in, I think.'

So Chang mounted once more and told the children, who had heard a good deal of the talk, about Chang Nai-nai's efforts to converse with An Ching. They both went to try and persuade her to come, and found her in her own room. She finally consented, and, half dragged by the children, appeared through the round hole. Chang, who was still at his post, took away all An Ching's embarrassment by greeting her with :

'Is the young Ku Nai-nai well?'

Then, after a few more formalities, he asked Little Yi to go and stand in the round gateway, so as to be able to warn them if any one came, and he began at once to

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discuss with An Ching ways and means for releasing the children.

The arrangements were very simple. In eight days' time there would be sufficient moonlight.

The children were to wait until they were sure that Ku Nai-nai was asleep, and then squeeze themselves through the window over their kang and come out into the court. Chang would be on his side with Chi Fu, and they would let down a large round basket, into which the children must get, one at a time, and be hauled over the wall. An Ching suggested that she should ask Ku Nai-nai to allow her to go and visit a relative on the day which would be arranged for the flight, and she would stay there all night, to avoid suspicion. She saw very well that Chang could not take her away too, but she begged

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him to aid her if she found any means of joining Nelly later. Chang promised to think about it. Then he threw Nelly the pencil and a sheet of paper, and took leave of them all for that day. Nelly at once began to consider what to say to her parents, and finally wrote the following letter :

‘DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER—
I am quite safe here in Yung Ching with the Kus, and so is Little Yi, but we want to come home. Chang, who lives next door and heard us singing, is going to try to help us to get away. Ku Hung Li, who stole us, says he will send us home with a barber, but I would rather go with Chang. There is a very nice girl called An Ching, who is very kind to us, and I want her to come and live with us in Peking, but her feet are very small,

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so she can't do much, though she can sew beautifully. How is Baby Buckle? and Bob and Bessie and Arthur, and all the other children? I wear Chinese dress now, but my hair has only been shaved once. There is no more room on this paper, and this is all I have. Chang gave me it; he is a Christian.

‘Your loving daughter,
‘NELLY GREY.’

This letter took Nelly more than a day to write. When it was done she threw it over the wall into Chang's compound.

Chang and Chi Fu were very busy during the next few days in making arrangements for a cart to be ready on the night fixed for the flight. Nelly and Little Yi on their side were all impatience for the day to arrive, and poor An Ching was despondent. She hunted

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over all her treasures, and gave each of the children a keepsake. Nelly's was a little square looking-glass with tassels, to hang from her belt, and Little Yi had a thick silver ring with an enamelled green frog in the centre. Nelly thought of plan after plan for An Ching's escape, but An Ching shook her head at each one. 'Oh, Nelly,' she said one day, 'how lucky you are not to have been born a China-woman !'

CHAPTER XI

AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE

EVERYTHING went on well in both compounds. Chang came at the call of the little red signal every day, and let An Ching know what he and Chi Fu were doing. Nelly asked Chang if he thought that Chi Fu could tell her the date, and Chi Fu sent her an almanac which had been given to him by a missionary at the beginning of the year, but it was of no use to Nelly until Chang told her that the longest day was only nine days off; so she put a cross at the date which was nine

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days before the 21st of June, and thus found out the exact date. In this way she knew when Sunday came, and although there would be only one more for her to spend in Yung Ching, she resolved to keep it in the best way she could, by saying over to herself all the hymns she could remember and taking more time for her prayers that morning; neither would she do any teaching or sewing.

The day before the one fixed for the moonlight adventure arrived. An Ching had got permission to go and see her relatives the next day; the old servant, who was better, was to go with her. It was very hot, almost too hot to talk. Ku Nai-nai said there would be a thunderstorm. An Ching, Nelly, and Little Yi were sitting on the bench in the small court. They had just had a

An Unpleasant Surprise

visit from Chang, who told them not to expect him the next day, as he must go and fetch the mule in the evening. He and Chi Fu would certainly be there the next night, he said, and he cautioned the children to close the window after they had climbed through. Little Yi was almost asleep, and was swaying to and fro as she sat on the bench. Nelly had hold of An Ching's hand, and was telling her how she should send her messages through Chang's mission. Nelly had got over the excitement, and was quietly happy at the thought of going home. How she longed to see her dear father and mother and Baby Buckle! She thought of all this for some time, with her hand still in An Ching's; and An Ching was thinking of her loneliness when the children would

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be no longer with her, and of Hung Li's wrath when he returned. Then Nelly too was overcome by the heat, and she nodded and bobbed about until at last her head fell in An Ching's lap. An Ching stroked the pretty little cheek, and felt as if her heart would break at losing her friend. She was resolutely keeping back her tears, when all three gave a great start, and the children were wide awake in a moment. There was a loud rumbling sound.

‘The thunder!’ exclaimed Nelly.

But An Ching knew better. She realised that the noise came from a cart passing under the archway into the outer court next to the street, and that Hung Li had come back. She said nothing, and all three stood listening. Sure enough, it

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was a cart, and the large gate was being opened. The children heard it too, and although no one spoke a word, each one knew that it must be Hung Li. There was no mistaking now ; it was his voice in the inner court talking to Ku Nai-nai.

‘I must go,’ said An Ching. ‘We will talk it over again this afternoon. You two must pretend to be glad that Hung Li has come back.’

An Ching left them, and was greeted by her husband with a command to get him something to drink. Ku Nai-nai began to scold her for being out of the way when needed. She did not mind though, for now, perhaps, she thought, the children would not go away the next night.

Hung Li set about unharnessing the mule, and tied it to a post in the

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court. He then partook of some food, which they had hastily prepared for him, and flung himself down on the kang, where he was soon fast asleep. When An Ching could get away, she took the children's bowls and chopsticks into the small court, and they fetched their food from the cook-house. Little Yi was the first to ask if they should still get out of the window and be hauled up the wall in a basket, as arranged.

‘It would be of no use,’ said An Ching. ‘Hung Li has the mule ready, and would easily overtake your cart next morning.’

‘But,’ exclaimed Nelly, ‘Chang says he has as much right to us as Hung Li, and I don’t see why we can’t go.’

‘Hung Li would kill me if you escaped while I am here to look after

An Unpleasant Surprise

you,' replied An Ching. 'If I go away to-morrow you might try to get off, but we can't decide anything until we hear what he intends to do.'

Hung Li slept peacefully for a couple of hours. Then he got up, called for Ku Nai-nai and An Ching, refreshed himself by wiping his face with a rag dipped in hot water, and took a deep draught from the spout of the tea-pot, after which he began to talk.

'We shall start to-night' he said.

There are bills out all over Peking offering 500 taels (£100) reward for the children. I shall take them back at once. An Ching must go too, to look after them. The barber will wait for us at the city gate, and send a message to the *ying kua jên* (Englishman) as soon as we arrive. It is all settled.'

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Ku Nai-nai grunted. She did not really care what became of the children, but she told Hung Li she hoped he would make sure of the money, and that too much of it would not stick to the barber's fingers.

An Ching was delighted, though she did not dare to show it. She left the room, saying she must make ready. Her first care was to find the little girls and tell them the news.

Although Nelly and Little Yi would rather have gone with Chang, they were very pleased to hear that they were to start so soon, especially as An Ching was to go with them.

'Then we shall not go over the wall in a basket after all,' said Little Yi. 'I should have liked that.'

'We must write a letter at once,'

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said Nelly, 'and throw it into Chang's compound.' 'Yes,' said An Ching, 'but who is to write it?'

This was a puzzle. An Ching, like nearly all Chinese women, could not write at all, and Nelly could only do so in English.

'You know some characters, Little Yi,' continued An Ching. 'Suppose you try.'

Little Yi felt very much flattered. 'All right,' she said. 'Give me a piece of paper and I'll do it.'

An Ching tottered off to her room, and returned with a piece of the rough tissue paper which the Chinese use for writing upon, a brush, a piece of Indian ink, and a slate slab to mix it on, all tucked up her sleeve.

Little Yi knelt down and spread her materials on the bench, while An Ching stood ready to sit down

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on the letter in case Hung Li or his mother came.

Little Yi could only make a few characters, and had never written a letter, but she began boldly with a beautiful 'we.'

'Can not come,' said Nelly.

'I can't make "can,"' said Little Yi ; so she wrote 'not' and as much as she could remember of 'come.'

'Hung Li is here,' dictated Nelly.

'How can you expect me to know how to make "Hung" and "Li"?' objected the scribe.

An Ching said that the character for 'Hung' was the same as that used for the word 'red,' and she thought she could make the 'Li.'

She took the pen and did it, very badly and quite crooked.

Then Little Yi found she was not able to make 'is.' She missed that and put 'here.'

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The letter then read, 'We not come. Hung Li here.'

'That's enough,' said An Ching. 'Fold it up and put any character which means Chang on the outside.'

Little Yi did so, and they screwed the bit of paper up with a pebble inside and threw it over the wall.

The preparations for departure were very few and simple. They had no luggage. An Ching had a small bundle with some extra clothing, comb, etc., and a box was fastened on behind the cart with cups, a teapot, a few cooking utensils, and some charcoal for cooking their food on the way. Nelly could hardly believe that they were to start. They had only been a few months in Yung Ching, but it seemed like years.

Ku Nai-nai was unusually pleasant at the last. She told Little Yi that

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she should miss her, and said a few kind words to Nelly.

Just before sunset the party started. An Ching and the children were inside the cart, with Hung Li as driver, sitting on the shafts. Hung Li had forgotten to pull down the curtain in front of the cart, and just as they turned out of the compound into the street they came face to face with Chang.

Nelly and Little Yi both started and bent forward to greet him, but An Ching held them back and whispered, 'Hush !'

Chang, after making sure that Hung Li was not looking, quickly put his head forward and asked under his breath, 'To Peking ?'

The children nodded vigorously, but An Ching said, in a low voice, 'I don't know.'

Chang vanished, and the children

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looked questioningly at An Ching. She motioned to them to keep silent, and they did so, greatly wondering. When Hung Li, who was sitting with his back to the others, turned and saw that the curtain was not drawn, he angrily pulled it down, whipped up the mule, and they were off at a good pace. Nelly was quite pleased to feel the jolting of a cart once more. 'But surely,' she thought, 'this one bumps more than others.' It seemed so to her because she had not been in a cart for so long a time.

Just when they were getting outside Yung Ching, the thunderstorm which they had been expecting came, and the rain fell heavily, so that they were glad to keep well inside the cart. Hung Li tried to get under shelter too,

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but he found that he must make up his mind to bear the rain, if he meant to get any distance on the road before it became dark. He was very cross, and no one dared to speak a word.

CHAPTER XII

POOR MULE !

It was very uncomfortable for every one during the next couple of hours. The cotton covering of the cart became soaked, and drops of water began to fall through. Hung Li was in a dreadful temper because the mule had gone slightly lame, and he was afraid that it would not be able to reach the first stopping-place. How he did lash and scold the poor creature ! An Ching took the opportunity, when he was obliged to get down and lead it, to explain why she had told Chang

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she was not sure that they were going to Peking.

‘I heard him say,’ she jerked out, ‘that if he were questioned about a foreign child on the road, or if people seemed inquisitive, he should branch off half way and go to some quiet country place. Ku Nai-nai told him he would be very foolish to do so ; but he is very obstinate, and if he gets a little too much wine there is no knowing what he will do.’

‘Dear me !’ sighed Nelly, ‘shall we ever get home ?’

‘To be sure you will,’ replied An Ching. ‘Chang will let the foreigners in Peking know where you have been, and your letter will be sent.’

‘Yes, and mother will know that I am well,’ thought Nelly.

They went on until they came

Poor Mule !

to the river, which it was too late to cross, even if the mule had been able to do it. There was a small inn close at hand. Hung Li knocked at the door, roused the inn-keeper, and asked for one small room for his wife and children. He said that one of them, a boy, had hurt his leg, and he should carry him in. Nelly found that she was the boy. An Ching bundled her up well about the head, and Hung Li carried her to the kang, where she was soon fast asleep.

‘You will have to carry Little Yi too,’ An Ching told Hung Li. ‘If the inn-keeper sees her feet he will never believe she is your child.’ Hung Li did so, pretending that he did not want her shoes to get wet. Then, being afraid that the mule might die, he gave it a good feed

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and comfortable quarters for the night.

Next morning the children were very stiff, and would have liked to run about, but they were kept shut up in the room while An Ching fetched their food, and as soon as the cart was ready they were carried back to it, with the same excuses.

It was with great difficulty, in spite of the good food and rest which had been given to the mule, that it was able to pull the cart up the steep muddy bank after crossing the river. It stood panting hard for some time when the task was finished, quite regardless of the blows administered by the cruel driver.

‘You’ll never get to Peking with that mule,’ called out the ferryman as they started.

They went along very slowly.

Poor Mule !

An Ching suggested, when they arrived at a quiet, open part of the road, that the children should walk to lighten the cart, and they were very glad to be out in the fresh morning air ; even An Ching got out when they came to a slight incline, but Hung Li took care to make the children climb in again whenever he saw a human being approach.

Now that Yung Ching was well behind them, Hung Li decided not to urge the mule too much, in case it died before he was able to return it to the man from whom he had hired it in Peking ; so that morning passed pleasantly enough. The children gathered flowers by the wayside, and the sunshine made Nelly hopeful. It was a delight to be in the country, with all so fresh and cool after the rain. At mid-day

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they passed through a dirty village, where they bought some eggs and bread. When they were well outside the village they cooked the eggs and took a meal, after which the mule was unharnessed and fed, greatly to his surprise, and the children had a sleep in the cart, while Hung Li and An Ching reposed on some straw close by.

That afternoon they passed a funny little hut with a red dog painted on the door, which Nelly remembered to have seen on the journey from Peking. She wondered if they would go to any of the same inns they had stayed at before, but Hung Li carefully avoided them, and took a different road as often as possible.

When they put up at the inn that night the children were again carried, with the same explanations,

Poor Mule !

although the ground was not very wet this time.

‘To-morrow we shall be in Peking,’ said Nelly delightedly.

‘No,’ replied An Ching. ‘We have come very slowly ; we shall be three nights on the road this time.’

Nelly was disappointed, but made the best of it. She slept badly that night, and had a headache the next morning.

An Ching was away a long time getting the breakfast, and when she returned with her hands full she was very excited.

‘One of the placards offering the reward for you two has just been stuck on the wall of this inn,’ she exclaimed. ‘Hung Li is in a great rage. He says he must be off at once. He intends to get another mule and hurry off to Peking.’

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‘So he is not going to take us to some other place? I am so glad,’ said Nelly.

‘No, he seems to have changed his mind. I am to get a small coat for Little Yi, and she is to pretend to be a boy.’

‘Why me?’ exclaimed Little Yi. ‘My ears are pierced. I could not be a boy, and I won’t. Nelly was the boy yesterday.’

‘What does it matter? No one will notice the holes in your ears if you take out the earrings, and then you can run about. Nelly must not be seen at all, Hung Li says. It’s no use objecting. You’ll have to do it. You naughty boy!’ she shouted, as she heard Hung Li and another man talking outside the door.

Little Yi and Nelly giggled. Then An Ching locked them in

Poor Mule !

and went to buy the coat. There was very little difference between it and the one she was wearing. An Ching saw that Little Yi's queue was right, took out her earrings, and then removed her bracelets.

Nelly was carried to the cart in a bundle, and Little Yi, in no amiable mood at having lost her earrings and wooden bracelets, was hustled in after An Ching.

Nelly was still feeling rather weak and tired, and so was the poor mule. He dragged them wearily along the road for a couple of hours, and then his troubles were all over, for he stopped quite still and dropped to the ground, and before Hung Li could get him out of the shafts he was quite dead.

Of course every one was obliged to come down from the cart. Little

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Yi and An Ching helped to undo the harness and Hung Li dragged the mule out of the way. Nelly shed a few tears over the poor dead animal which had toiled on so bravely to the end.

Hung Li was in a worse temper than ever. He wished he had never seen the little foreign imp and big-footed Manchu child ; 'and I wish I could get rid of you as well,' he said to An Ching. At last he set off to fetch another mule, threatening all sorts of penalties to whoever stirred from the spot or spoke to passers-by. Before going, he propped up the shafts of the cart and made them all get inside. They were relieved when the angry man had gone, and tried to settle themselves comfortably in the cart ; but when he was well out of sight, Little Yi, regardless of con-

Poor Mule !

sequences, got out and looked round. An Ching did not trouble much, as she knew Hung Li could not be back very soon, but when after a time she put her head outside and could not see Little Yi at all, she became uneasy and herself got out. Nelly did the same. They called and ran in every direction before they found her. An Ching thought she saw something moving behind a clump of bushes some yards away. She asked Nelly, who could walk much better than she, to go and see. Nelly went behind the bushes, and sure enough she saw Little Yi a long way off, running away as hard as she could towards two men, one of whom Nelly to her great surprise and joy recognised as Chang. The other she thought must be Chi Fu. She waited until they came near, then she rushed forward, caught

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hold of Chang's hand and burst into tears.

Tears of joy don't last very long. Nelly's were soon gone, and there was no trace of them when they all went to the other side of the bushes, where they found An Ching, who stood as if spellbound when she saw them.

'However did you find us?' she asked Chang. 'But you must go away,' she added; 'Hung Li may be back any moment. He will kill me if he finds you here,' and she hurried the children into the cart and got in herself.

When they were safely in, Chang said: 'This is my son Chi Fu. He will keep a good look-out and I will talk to you here. If Hung Li comes we can walk quietly away. But he can't be back for a long time yet if he has gone to get a mule; the next

Poor Mule !

village is nearly as far as the one you left this morning.'

Chang then told them how he and Chi Fu came to be there.

'When I saw you start,' he said, 'I at once went into my house and consulted with my son, who said that he and I must certainly follow you. He got two mules at once and we set off early next morning. We rode hard and reached the river well before noon. At the inn near the river we heard about a party which had crossed earlier, and although the inn-keeper said the children were boy and girl, we felt sure that it must have been you.'

Here Chi Fu came up and put in his word.

'Don't forget to tell the young foreign lady that her letter has been sent off,' he said.

'No,' replied Chang ; 'I'll tell

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her. You must go farther away and keep a good look-out on the road the way Hung Li went.' And Chang turned to Nelly and told her that a courier had started for the Peking mission two days ago and taken her letter enclosed in one for the missionary from Chi Fu.

'And did you get my letter?' asked Little Yi. 'We threw it over the wall.'

Chang replied that his wife had picked up a piece of paper with some writing upon it, but it was nearly all blotted out by the rain and could not be read.

'It was of no consequence,' said An Ching, at which Little Yi was not pleased. 'How did you manage to find us?'

'We rode on quickly, and very soon saw your cart in the distance; then we followed by a side road

Poor Mule !

too narrow for a cart. When you stopped to rest at noon I got off my mule and came quite close. I saw the young Ku Nai-nai as she lay asleep.'

An Ching did not much like this, but she said nothing.

Chang continued : ' It was easy to follow you and put up at the same inn at night, especially as Hung Li did not know us. We rode after you this morning, and when we saw that the mule had fallen we left ours with an old man in a hut over there,' pointing beyond the bushes, 'and began to walk towards you. Little Yi saw us coming, and here we are.'

CHAPTER XIII

THE ROAD TO PEKING

‘Now what are you going to do?’ asked An Ching.

‘We shall follow you to Peking or wherever Hung Li takes you, and then go at once and tell the English gentleman where you are. You have no need to fear now,’ turning to Nelly, ‘that you will not get home.’

‘And can’t An Ching come with us?’

‘I dare not take her,’ said Chang, ‘but perhaps your father can arrange something. Now I will

The Road to Peking

go and ask Chi Fu what we had best do.'

Chi Fu thought that all they could do for the present was to keep the party well in sight and put up at the same inn that night. Chang returned and told An Ching this, and said they would go and get their mules. He cautioned all three not to appear to know either of them, even if they came and spoke to Hung Li.

After Chang and Chi Fu went away it seemed a very long time before Hung Li returned with another mule. He was accompanied by a man who brought a cart and took away the dead animal. Hung Li told An Ching that he had only been able to get a mule to take them as far as the next village, and they must put up there. He had brought some food, and

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they prepared another meal by the roadside. The children ate sitting in the cart. As soon as they had finished, Hung harnessed the mule and then set off once more.

This was a good strong beast and took them along briskly to the next village, but as so much time had already been wasted it was late in the afternoon when they arrived.

Hung Li was now obliged to go in search of another mule and return the one he had to its owner. By the time this was done, it was too late to start again that day.

The inn was about a hundred yards from the main road. It stood in an open space and was reached by a narrow winding path. All round and between the inn and the road was short grass and stubble. But on the opposite side of the

The Road to Peking

road, a short distance on the way they had come, there was a hillock with a clump of trees at one side. The room which had been engaged for An Ching had its door, and also a small window, opening towards the road. Nelly and Little Yi could quite well see the hillock and clump of trees on the other side of the road from the window, and they had not been long in the room before they noticed that Chang and Chi Fu were there with their mules. Later in the evening they saw the two come over to the inn and heard them make arrangements to put up there for the night. An Ching went outside and passed them quite close, but they took no notice of her. She heard Chang inquire of Hung Li if he were going to Peking next day.

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‘I am not sure,’ said Hung Li, in a very surly tone.

Chang took no notice of his rudeness, but said politely :

‘I hope you will permit my son and me to follow your party, as we are strangers to these parts and not very sure of the road.’

‘You can if you like,’ replied Hung Ching ungraciously, and walked away. An Ching felt sure he had been drinking.

Nelly was still feeling far from well when she awoke next morning. She got up early, slipped the bolt, went out on to the dewy grass and looked up the road towards Peking. The fresh air revived her, although she was still very languid and depressed when she returned to the room. An Ching was awake, and reproved her for going out.

‘You know how dreadfully angry

The Road to Peking

Hung Li would be with me if he saw you,' she said.

But she let Nelly stand at the open window, and Little Yi, being in boy's clothing, was not prevented from going in and out as she pleased.

An Ching went as usual to get the breakfast. Hung Li was still half tipsy. He said he was in a hurry to be off, although he did not appear to be making any preparations.

Chang and Chi Fu took their mules and went to the hillock to wait until Hung Li's party started. Nelly was sitting listlessly in the room, and Little Yi had gone outside to have a look round. Presently a cloud of dust began to rise from the road in the distance, and four riders came in sight. Little Yi looked intently, suddenly turned round, and ran back to the room

The Little Girl Lost

where Nelly was, crying breathlessly :

‘There’s your father and another gentleman riding from Peking !’

Nelly jumped up, dashed through the door and into the grassy space, paused a moment to look, and set off as fast as she could go. How she ran ! but her legs felt weak, something thumped in her head, and her heart went pit-a-pat.

Mr. Grey rode with his head bent, and was looking at the ground.

‘Father ! father ! father ! do stop !’ Nelly called out.

But her father did not see or hear, and there was An Ching shouting to her, and she knew that Hung Li might be after her directly.

‘Father ! father !’ she wailed.

She thought she shouted loudly, but her voice was very weak and

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quite drowned by the clattering of the pony's hoofs.

Still he did not look up, and was going by without seeing her ! It was too much for the poor child. She felt as though everything was turning upside down, and just as her father rode past she fell to the ground in a faint.

But Chi Fu had seen it all from the hillock ; and as Nelly fell he dashed forward and stood with outstretched arms in the middle of the road, ready to stop Mr. Grey's pony. When it came up he caught hold of the bridle and turned the head right round, greatly to the astonishment of the rider.

‘What does this mean ?’ exclaimed Mr. Grey angrily.

‘Your daughter ! your daughter !’ replied Chi Fu, pointing to Nelly as she lay on the ground.

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Mr. Grey asked no more questions, but spurred his pony and galloped back to where the little girl lay, Chi Fu running after him. He jumped off his pony and stooped anxiously over the little figure.

‘It’s Nelly,’ he said, when he looked at the face, and he kissed her.

Mr. Grey soon saw that she was only in a faint, and taking her in his arms he carried her towards the inn, feeling very happy to have recovered his little girl. When Little Yi came up he recognised her in spite of her boy’s clothing, and giving her a kindly pat on the head he told her to keep close to him and run to get some water as soon as they were at the inn. Little Yi showed him the room they were occupying and went for the water, while Mr. Grey sat with his child on his knee.

The Road to Peking

When her father bathed her head with the water Nelly soon recovered. Her happiness and delight when she found herself in her father's arms cannot be described. Let each girl who reads this imagine it for herself.

CHAPTER XIV

FATHER AND MOTHER

WITH the help of Little Yi, who talked sixteen to the dozen, Nelly soon told her father the whole story. Then came such a string of questions, about Nelly's mother and Baby Buckle, and all Nelly's Peking friends and Little Yi's as well! The talking was nearly all in Chinese. Nelly found it difficult to get back into English, she said.

‘You will make Hung Li give up An Ching and take her with us, father, won't you?’ asked Nelly.

Father and Mother

‘I’ll see what I can do,’ her father promised, ‘but I am afraid it cannot be managed.’

‘It can be done easily enough if you will buy her, Sir,’ said Little Yi. ‘Hung Li does not like her, and he loves money.’

This was a new idea to Mr. Grey. He thought he might be able to arrange it after all. ‘We will go and see them and talk about it,’ he said.

The courtyard of the inn was in a state of great confusion when Mr. Grey and the children entered it. Hung Li was raging and fuming in a dreadful way, while An Ching stood by with a frightened face. The two Changs were trying to explain things to the Legation student who had come with Mr. Grey from Peking to go with him to Yung Ching in search of Nelly.

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They had started as soon as Nelly's letter reached the Legation. This young gentleman, who had been in China only a short time, understood very little Chinese, and Chang and Chi Fu were trying to talk to him by signs. It was funny to see them pointing to the wall, a basket, red paper and a rope. The poor student was hopelessly muddled, but the Chinese grooms who had come with him and Mr. Grey quite understood and were enjoying themselves thoroughly. The inn-keeper was shouting directions to every one, and his wife trying to question An Ching, who was in a terrible fright. A crowd of villagers began to collect, and every one was talking at once.

Leaving the children in charge of his companion, Mr. Grey pushed his way into the midst of the

Father and Mother

throng, shouting at the top of his voice :

‘Where’s the man who stole my daughter?’

The noise stopped at once. A dozen pair of hands seized Hung Li and An Ching and brought them face to face with Mr. Grey, while the crowd closed eagerly round.

Hung Li was dreadfully afraid. He had counted on the children being handed over by his friend the barber in exchange for a nice round sum of money, and had never thought the affair would bring him within arm’s length of a fierce foreigner.

‘Why did you do this?’ asked Mr. Grey sternly.

‘I did not,’ said the coward. ‘It was my mother who stole the child and hid her from me. I was taking her back to Peking.’

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‘Very well,’ said Mr. Grey, ‘I must hand you over to the magistrate.’

This was quite enough for Hung Li, who knew that if he were once inside a Chinese prison he might have to stay there a very long time.

‘Don’t tell me any lies,’ Mr. Grey continued. ‘You kept my daughter shut up in your house, and she might have died if it had not been for your wife.’

Hung Li grunted, but said nothing.

‘But,’ went on Mr. Grey, ‘I will let you go on one condition, that you give up all claim to your wife and let her come to live with my daughter in Peking, and I will give you fifty taels for her.’

Hung Li did not expect to be let off so easily. ‘Take the woman,’ he said. ‘She has no children and I don’t want her.’

Father and Mother

‘All right,’ replied Mr. Grey. ‘I take all these people to witness our bargain.’

There was a chorus of ‘Hao, hao’ (good, good), from the crowd, and everybody seemed pleased.

Mr. Grey at once ordered his servant to fetch his bag containing the lumps of silver and long strings of copper cash with a hole through the middle, which are the only coins the Chinese have. The inn-keeper brought a scale ; the silver was weighed and handed over to Hung Li. He went away without taking any notice of An Ching, and nobody was surprised. The Chinese do not think much of women, you see.

As for An Ching, she was delighted.

All this time Chang and his son had kept quietly in the background.

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They were Hung Li's neighbours and did not want to make an enemy of him. This was their Chinese caution. As soon as he had gone they came forward. Mr. Grey thanked them warmly, and told them that they should have the reward he had offered if they would come with him to Peking, which they were very glad to do.

They were soon ready to leave the inn. Mr. Grey's servant had hired a cart and good strong mule. An Ching and the children got into the cart and the others rode alongside, excepting the Legation student, who went ahead to prepare Mrs. Grey.

Nelly was almost too excited to sit still as they came into Peking, and even Little Yi was very anxious.

'How do you feel, An Ching?' asked Nelly.

Father and Mother

‘I don’t know,’ she replied. ‘Glad and sorry, but more glad than sorry. Nobody cares for me but you now. My parents did, a little, but no Chinese girl is ever loved by her father as yours loves you.’

‘That’s not true,’ said Little Yi, although she knew that it was.

‘Well, I hope I am wrong, Little Yi. When children are as good and truthful as Nelly perhaps their parents are very fond of them ; but I never knew a Chinese girl so good.’

Little Yi sniffed, but said no more.

When the large gates of the Legation were opened and the cart drove in, Nelly almost fainted again. It was a very pale, fragile-looking little creature that Mr. Grey lifted out of the cart. Mrs. Grey had been on the look-out, and could not

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remain indoors when she saw the party arrive. She rushed hatless across the compound, and Nelly bounded to meet her. Mother and child clung to each other with all their might, while Chu Ma fairly wept for joy to see her baby, as she called Nelly. At the same time Little Yi's parents dashed towards her and embraced her, and they all began chattering and crying. Little Yi hoped An Ching would notice how affectionate her father was.

It was not until they had gone indoors that Mr. and Mrs. Grey remembered the Changs and An Ching. When Mr. Grey at length brought An Ching into the room, Mrs. Grey kissed her too and thanked her for being so good to Nelly.

Mrs. Grey herself put Nelly to bed that night. It seemed so strange to Nelly to see everything just as

Father and Mother

she had left it. There was actually the almanac on the wall with the coloured picture of Ruth and Boaz in the field. Nelly had pinned this almanac up months ago when she was attending a dancing class at the American Legation, because, she said, 'Boaz was doing the first position of the waltz step beautifully.' She laughed, and it did her good and she felt glad and happy. As she said her prayers that night, she felt as though she really loved God and that He quite understood when she thanked Him for the gift of a good father and mother.

CONCLUSION

THE next few days Nelly spent quietly with her parents, and in showing An Ching all the wonders of a foreign household. Then she was taken by her father and mother to spend the rest of the summer in a Chinese temple at the hills, where she soon saw all her friends.

Baby Buckle did not know her, of course, and the coat she had brought him was too small, as he had grown very much. But he was 'darlinger' than ever, Nelly said. Bessie Bates and Liza and Bertha were delighted to see Nelly, but they seemed shy

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with her at first, and Bob Bates and Arthur MacDonald treated her almost as though she had been a grown-up lady. She was not very well all the summer, and the doctor advised a change. 'England,' he said, 'would be a good thing.' 'And school,' added Mr. Grey. And to England Nelly went in the autumn with her mother and An Ching. She was left with her aunt in Brighton, where she attended a day school near her brother Tom's. An Ching stayed with her and learnt to speak English very well. The people of Brighton used to stare at An Ching almost as much as the Chinese did at Nelly when she was stolen in Peking. She became a Christian in time and used to go to church regularly. Two years later, Arthur MacDonald came to Tom's school and often spent his holiday

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afternoons at Nelly's aunt's. Bob and Bessie Bates went to school in America, but Liza and Bertha stayed with their governess in Peking. Baby Buckle grew into a very mischievous little boy ; so troublesome was he that his father decided to send him home, and he, too, when he was a very small boy, came to the school where Tom had been. Nelly used to go and see him and bring him to her aunt's. No matter how naughty he was, she always made excuses for him. 'He was such a darling baby, you know,' she used to say.

Little Yi never tired of telling her adventures, and all her female relatives, none of whom had ever been outside Peking, looked upon her as a great traveller. Chi Fu studied so well that he became a school teacher in the Church

Conclusion

Mission. His parents admired him more than ever, and left Yung Ching to come and live near him. One day he received a letter from Nelly in English, and was able to read it to them in Chinese quite easily.

‘He is a great scholar, my son,’ said the good Chang to himself.

It was the proudest day of his life !

FINIS







